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Black Litigants in the Antebellum American South

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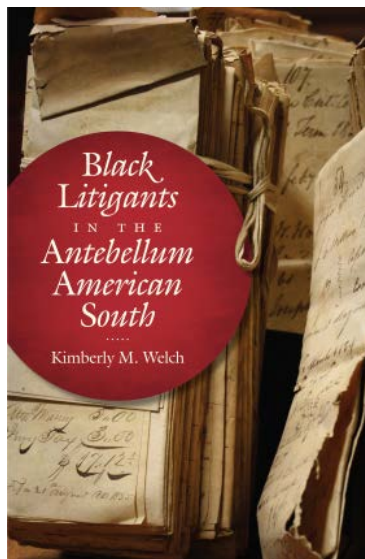
used *Black Reconstruction* to invert the tragic legend, showing how the real harm done to American democracy was not the rule of ‘black Republicanism’ but the reimposition of white supremacy, which both stymied the practical possibility of political progress and closed white Americans off to the historical self-understanding they needed to make sense of their own condition” (272).

The primary audience for *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois* is an academic one: upper level undergraduates through post-doctoral researchers and faculty members in African American Studies, Political Science, and American History. This title is recommended to college and university libraries collecting in these areas and perhaps to larger public libraries bearing in mind that the book is not really suited to the casual reader.

Having now reviewed this excellent volume, my interest in going on another W.E.B. Du Bois reading binge has been rekindled twenty years later.

Tim Dodge
Auburn University

Black Litigants in the Antebellum American South. Kimberly M. Welch. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-6496-3643-6 (hard.: \$39.95), 978-1-4696-3645-0 (Ebook; \$29.99) 328 p.



Kimberly Welch piqued my curiosity simply by her choice of a title for her research, “Black Litigants in The Antebellum American South”. Was she going to paint a picture for us of “gloom and doom” for black litigants in those years?

In the years between the War of 1812 and the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, “so called The Antebellum Years”, in the Natchez district of Mississippi/Louisiana, Welch says “black people sued white people in all white courtrooms”.

Found legal documents revealed enforcement of contracts, unpaid debts, and damages for assault were brought to the courts and judges by black litigants. Often these cases were won by the black litigants.

Welch credits the language of storytelling with the success of the black litigants. Lacking training in legal language, the litigants were good storytellers and knew the white judges and juries could relate to the concept of property, damage of property and loss of property. Swaying a jury by focusing upon the damages the litigant suffered due to lost or damaged property was a concept judges and jurors of the time understood.

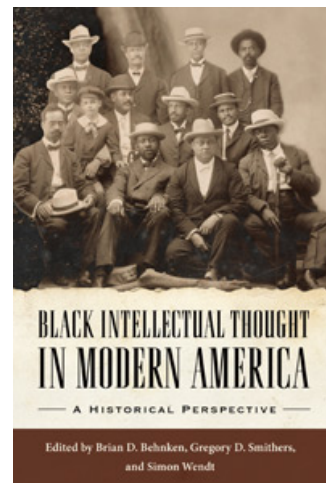
Welch uncovered in her extensive research over 1,000 court actions of free and enslaved black litigants who sought protection of their interests and redress of their damages. Welch’s research was conducted in courthouse basements, storage sheds, churches, and family histories.

Welch is an excellent storyteller and the research she provides is filled with stories of the cases she uncovered. There is very little “gloom and doom” in her stories. It is not painful to read but uplifting, highlighting the skill and ability of black litigants to express their rights to claim damages for the suffering they experienced.

This is an excellent book for academic and public libraries. I recommend it to be of particular interest to government, legal and archival societies.

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Black Intellectual Thought In Modern America: A Historical Perspective. Edited by Brian D. Behnken, Gregory D. Smithers, and Simon Wendt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4968-1365-7. 240 p. \$65.00.



If you are a person who likes to read essays. This text brings focus and meaning to the major leaders of black